

Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Service Report

1st April 2019 - 31st March 2020



The Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme is vital to the health and wellbeing of the entire community, helping to reduce the potential of drug-related litter, lowering the risk of HIV and Hepatitis B and C within the wider population, and putting those who use the service in direct contact with a health professional who can help them in engaging with treatment services to address their drug misuse. Needle exchange services are based in areas where there is an existing pattern of people who inject, but help protect everyone in the community. Anyone who injects substances can use a needle exchange service, and this includes people who inject opioids, steroids, tanning agents or stimulants.

This report summarises data that is collected on the operation of the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme (NSES). It relates to the twelve-month period between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020. The anonymised data was collected during this 12 month period by the 25 services that participate in the Northern Ireland Needle and Syringe Exchange Scheme (NSES) which was introduced in April 2001.

The data in this report is collated by area of Trust: Trust areas are coterminous with Local Commissioning Group (LCG) areas.

Participating service providers

Between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020 the Public Health Agency funded the Scheme through 22 pharmacies based across Northern Ireland, 1 Drug Outreach team and the Inclusion Health Service in Belfast and 1 Community Addiction Team Service based in Railway St. Ballymena. In October 2019, the PHA also commissioned a pilot community based Needle Exchange Service within Belfast.

Table 1: Participating Service Provider by Trust Area of Service Provider

Trust Area of Service	Pharmacy / Service Provider	Address	Address	Town
Belfast	Boots (Belfast)	35-47 Donegall Place, BT1 5AW	BT1 5AW	Belfast
Belfast	Chemist Connect	59 High Street Belfast, BT1 2AB	BT1 2AB	Belfast
Belfast	J McGregor Chemist Ltd	30 Botanic Avenue, BT7 1JQ	BT7 1JQ	Belfast
Belfast	Belfast Inclusion Health Service	Unit 36 28 Townsend Street Belfast	BT13 2ES	Belfast
Belfast	T. A. Maguire	3 Beechmount Avenue Belfast, BT12 7NA	BT12 7NA	Belfast
Belfast	Drug Outreach Team	159 Durham Street, BT12 4GB	BT12 4GB	Belfast
Belfast	Extem (Community Based Pilot)	9 Rosemary Street, Belfast BT1 1QA	BT1 1QA	Belfast
Northern	Boots (Antrim)	8 High Street, BT41 4AN	BT41 4AN	Antrim
Northern	CAS (Community Addiction Service)	Community Addictions Team, 105a Railway Street, BT42 2AF	BT42 2AF	Ballymena
Northern	Boots Queen St.	2-12 Queen Street, Harryville, BT42 2BB	BT42 2BB	Ballymena
Northern	Boots YLBP 4638	Ballymena Health Centre, 86 Cushendall Road, BT43 6HH	BT43 6HH	Ballymena
Northern	Boots (Coleraine)	26-28 Church Street, BT52 1AR	BT52 1AR	Coleraine
Northern	Boots (Cookstown)	5-7 James Street, BT80 8AA	BT80 8AA	Cookstown
Northern	Boots (Abbeycentre)	Abbeycentre, Longwood Road, BT37 9UH	BT37 9UH	Newtownabbey
South Eastern	Clear Pharmacy	42 Newtownards Road Bangor, BT20 4BP	BT20 4BP	Bangor
South Eastern	Gordons (Downpatrick)	35-37 Market Street, BT30 6LP	BT30 6LP	Downpatrick
South Eastern	Gordons (Lisburn)	56 Bow Street, BT28 1BN	BT28 1BN	Lisburn
South Eastern	Gordons (Newtownards)	2A Regent Street, BT23 4LH	BT23 4LH	Lisburn
Southern	Boots (Armagh)	15 Scotch Street, BT61 7BY	BT61 7BY	Armagh
Southern	Northern Pharmacies Ltd	Brownlow Health Centre, BT65 5BE	BT65 5BE	Craigavon
Southern	McKeagney	5 John Mitchell Place, BT34 2BP	BT34 2BP	Newry
Western	Lloyds Pharmacy	28 Belmore Street, BT74 6AA	BT74 6AA	Enniskillen
Western	Gordons (Limavady)	Unit 2, 57-61 Main Street, BT49 0EP	BT49 0EP	Limavady
Western	Lloyds Pharmacy	1 Ebrington Terrace, BT47 6JS	BT47 6JS	Londonderry
Western	Medicare - Mourne Pharmacy	5 John Mitchell Place, BT82 9BD	BT82 9BD	Strabane
Western	Superdrug	Ferryquay Street, BT48 6JD	BT48 6JD	Londonderry

Number of Visits to the Pharmacies

A total of 34,464 visits to facilitate the exchange of needles and syringes were made to the service over the twelve month period between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020. This is an increase in use of 472 (1%) visits on the 2018/19 figure (33,992).

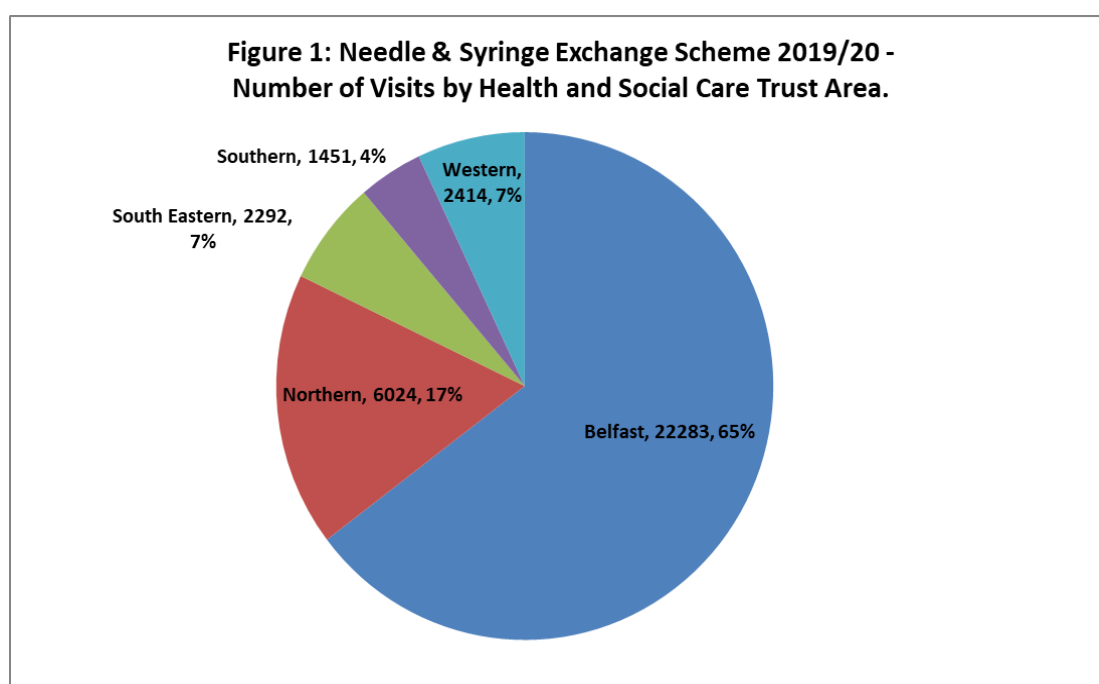
Nb. Due to gaps in reporting as a result of COVID towards year end, the data shown in this report may be an under-representation for the 2019/20 year

Table 2 and Figure 1 below show the number of visits by each Health and Social Care Trust area of Pharmacy.

The Belfast Trust area had the highest number of visits (65%) and the Southern Trust area the lowest number of visits (4%). Pharmacies in the Belfast Trust area experienced the largest increase in usage (up 6%) on the past year in demand while the Western Trust area noted a drop of 15% compared to the previous year.

Table 2: Number of Visits by Health & Social Care Trust Area of Pharmacy 2019/20 including percentage change from 2018/19

Trust Area of Pharmacy	No of Visits 2018/19	% of Visits by Trust of Pharmacy 2018/19	No of Visits 2019/20	% of Visits by Trust of Pharmacy 2019/20	Percentage Change from 2018/19
Belfast	20969	62%	22283	65%	6%
Northern	6459	19%	6024	17%	-7%
South Eastern	2199	6%	2292	7%	4%
Southern	1509	4%	1451	4%	-4%
Western	2856	8%	2414	7%	-15%
Total	33992	100%	34464	100%	1%



Number of Visits made by Health & Social Care Trust Area of Residents

Data collected by the pharmacies includes the first 4 digits of the client's postcode e.g. BT12 and this allows a restricted amount of analysis on the Trust area of residence of each client. Table 3 shows the highest percentage of visits made was from residents of Belfast Trust area (56%) and the lowest was from the Southern Trust area (5%). A small number of postcodes (1%) were not submitted to the database and 7 visits were made by non-residents of Northern Ireland.

Table 3: Number of Visits by Health & Social Care Trust Area of Residence

Trust Area of Residency	No of Visits 2018/19	% of Visits by Trust Area of Residency 2018/19	No of Visits 2019/20	% of Visits by Trust Area of Residency 2019/20	Percentage Change from 2018/19
Belfast	17386	51%	19135	56%	10%
Northern	6740	20%	6385	19%	-5%
South Eastern	4661	14%	4433	13%	-5%
Southern	1841	5%	1747	5%	-5%
Western	2914	9%	2475	7%	-15%
Unallocated/Blank Postcodes	450	1%	289	1%	-36%
Total	33992	100%	34464	100%	1%

The number of visits made per 100,000 HSCT population can be seen in Table 4 ranging from the highest, Belfast Trust area (5,318 visits per 100,000 population) to the lowest, Southern Trust area (451 visits per 100,000 population). The percentage change in visits from 2018/19 to 2019/20 was highest in the Belfast Trust with a 9% rise in visits by Belfast Trust area residents while there was a 15% decrease in Western trust residents to Needle & Syringe Exchange Scheme pharmacies.

Table 4: Visits per 100,000 Health & Social Care Trust Area Population

Trust Area of Residency	Number of Visits	Trust Population	Visits per 100,000 population 2018/19	Visits per 100,000 population 2019/20	% Change from 2018/19
Belfast	19135	359,845	4862	5318	9%
Northern	6385	479,360	1413	1332	-6%
South Eastern	4433	363,800	1290	1219	-6%
Southern	1747	387,162	480	451	-6%
Western	2475	303,500	964	815	-15%
Unallocated/Blank Postcodes	289	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Total	34464	1893667	1807	1820	1%

Population Source: NISRA Population Estimates 2019

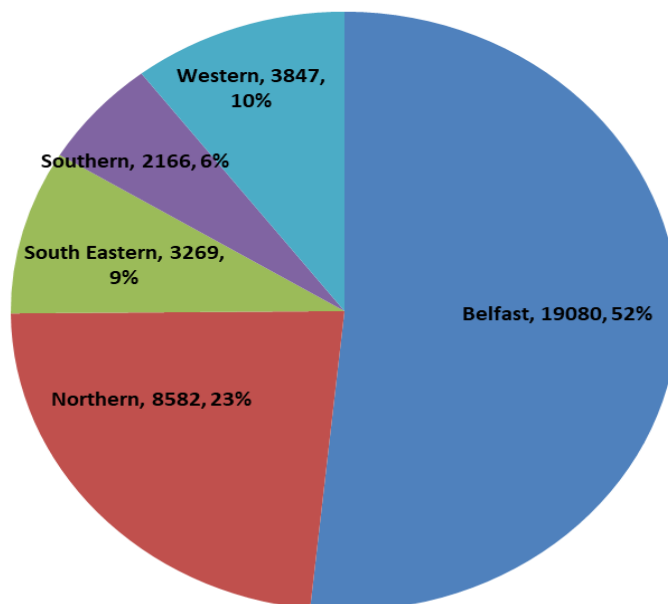
Number of Packs Issued by Health & Social Care Trust Area of Pharmacy

A total number of 36,944 packs have been issued across all HSC Trust areas. Table 5 and Figure 2 show the number and percentage of packs issued within each area. Pharmacies in the Belfast Trust area issued the highest number of packs (52%) and the lowest number was issued by pharmacies in the Southern Trust area (6%).

Table 5: Number and Percentage of Packs issued by Health & Social Care Trust Area of Pharmacy

Trust Area of Pharmacy	Total Packs	% of Total
Belfast	19080	52%
Northern	8582	23%
South Eastern	3269	9%
Southern	2166	6%
Western	3847	10%
Total	36944	100%

Figure 2: Number and percentage of packs issued by Pharmacies in each Health and Social Care Trust Area 2019/20 Trust Area

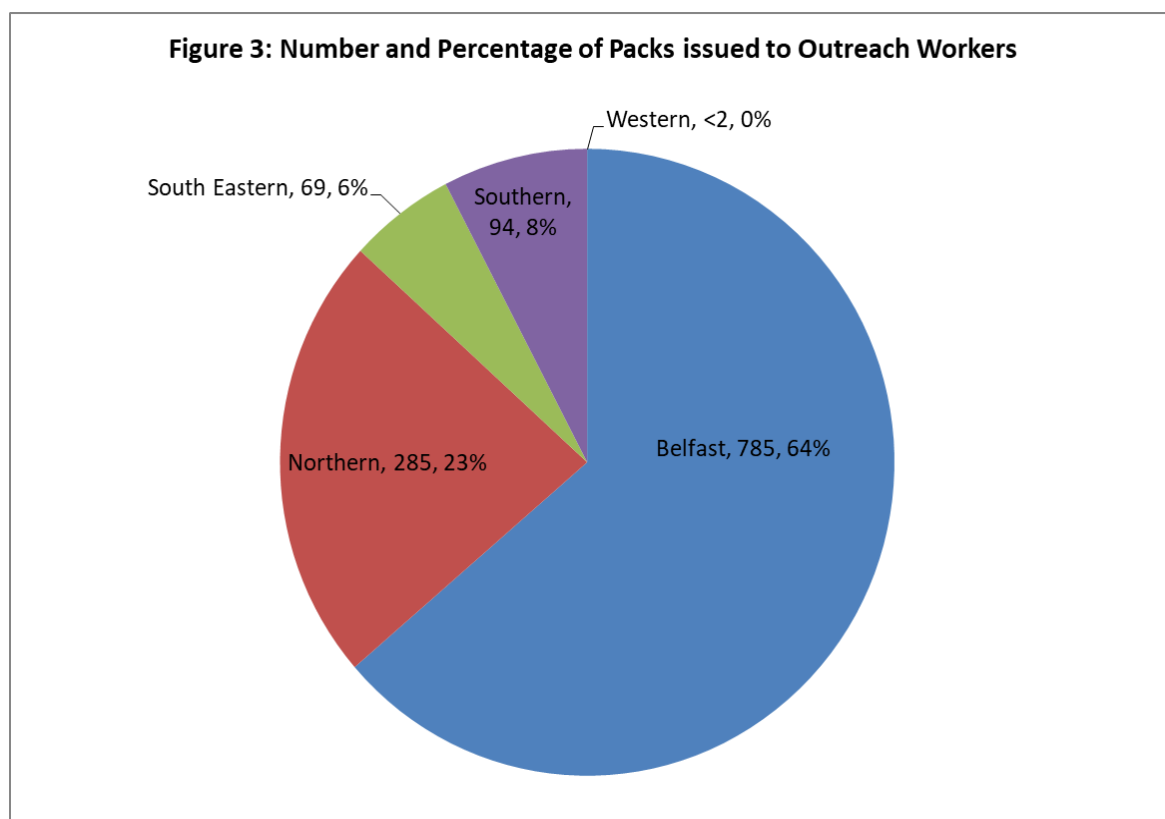


Number and Percentage of Packs Issued by Outreach Workers

During 2019-20, the Public Health Agency funded outreach services in all 5 Trust areas. These services work with people who use substances (drugs or alcohol) harmfully, but who are not ready to enter into treatment, thereby providing interventions to reduce harms to their clients in a more accessible manner. These services provide outreach needle exchange to relevant clients.

For some services, the outreach workers visit pharmacies to obtain packs on behalf of clients, whereas other outreach services will hold a supply of packs to issue to clients directly. Figure 3 shows the number and percentage of packs issued by outreach workers in the period 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020. Of the 1233 packs issued by outreach workers, the highest number, 785 (64%), was issued by staff working in the Belfast Trust area, while 285 (23%) was issued by staff working in the Northern Trust area and 94 (8%) was issued by staff working in the Southern Trust area.

Nb. Due to gaps in reporting as a result of COVID towards year end, the data shown in this report may be an under-representation for the 2019/20 year



Age of Clients using the Needle & Syringe Exchange Scheme

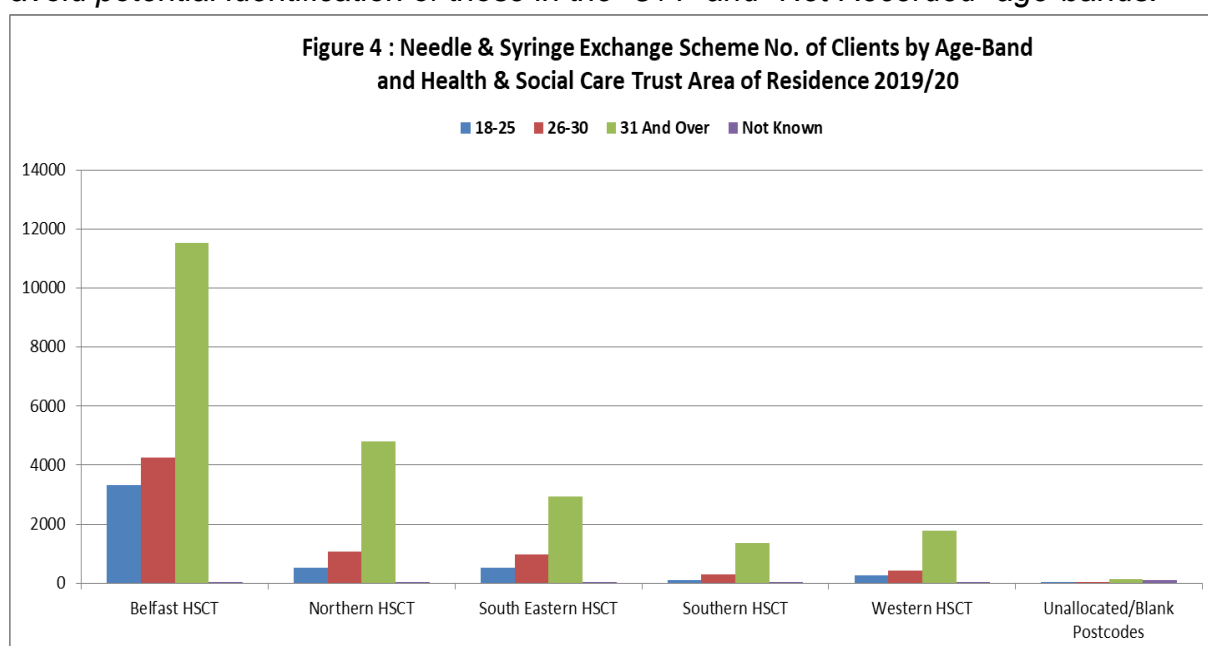
Table 6 and Figure 4 show the numbers and percentages of visits by age band. Please note the figures are shown by Trust Area of residence of the client.

During 2019-20, the highest percentage of visits to the scheme was from clients aged 31-40 years (44%). The 26-30 year old category accounted for 20% of visits, down 3% from last year in 2018/19. Among those aged 18-25 years, visits decreased from 15% last year to 14% this year.

Table 6: Number and Percentage of Visits by Age-Band by Health & Social Care Trust Area of Residence

Age-Band	Health & Social Care Trust Area of Residency of Client						Total
	Belfast	Northern	South-Eastern	Southern	Western	Not Known	
18-25	3324 (17%)	527 (8%)	523 (12%)	93 (5%)	277 (11%)	30 (10%)	4774 (14%)
26-30	4270 (22%)	1052 (16%)	972 (22%)	296 (17%)	413 (17%)	41 (14%)	7044 (20%)
31-40	8074 (42%)	3005 (47%)	1726 (39%)	1035 (59%)	1117 (45%)	89 (31%)	15046 (44%)
41-50	3014 (16%)	1592 (25%)	976 (22%)	219 (13%)	486 (20%)	25 (9%)	6312 (18%)
51+	431 (2%)	200 (3%)	<250 (0%)	<250 (0%)	166 (7%)	8 (3%)	1134 (3%)
Not Recorded	22 (0%)	9 (0%)	<250 (0%)	<250 (0%)	16 (1%)	96 (33%)	154 (0%)
Grand Total	19135 (100%)	6385 (100%)	4433 (100%)	1747 (100%)	2475 (100%)	289 (100%)	34464 (100%)

Note: <250 has been used in the table above due to small numbers and in order to avoid potential identification of those in the “51+” and “Not Recorded” age-bands.

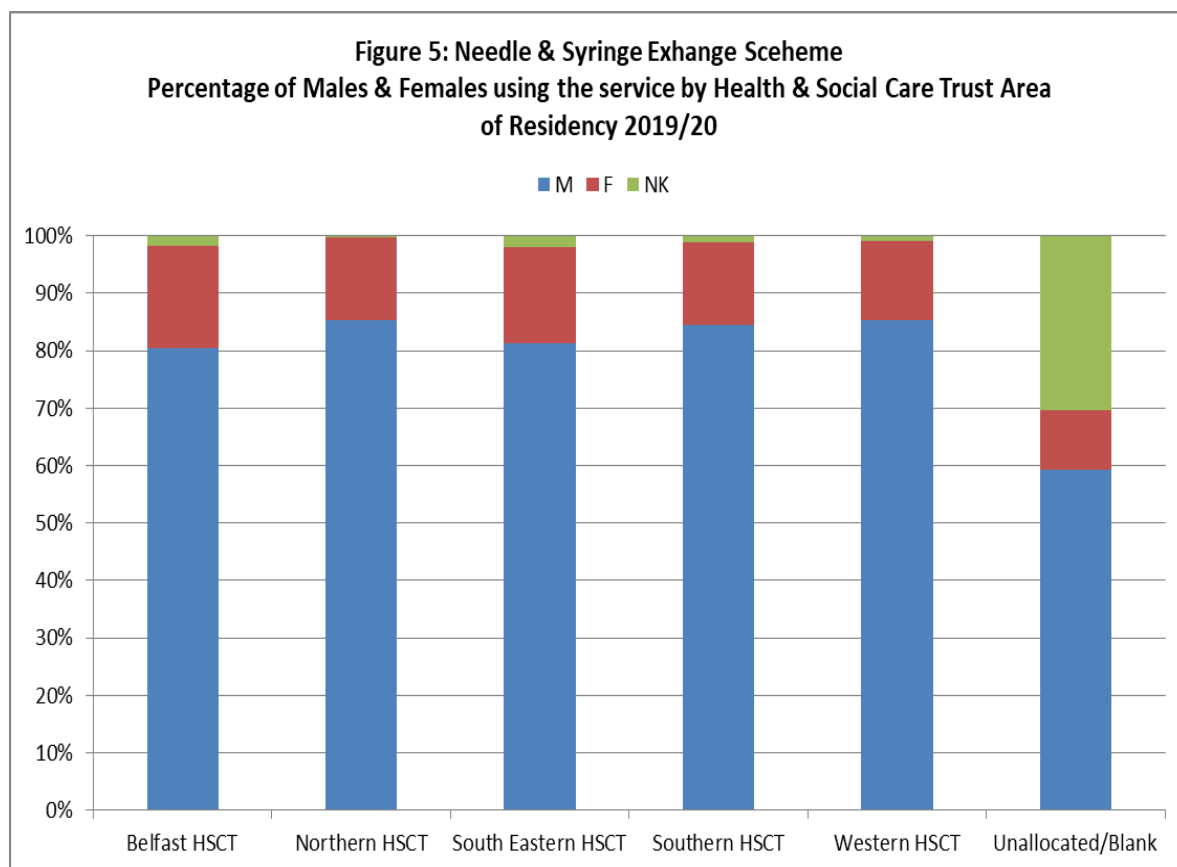


Gender of Clients using the Needle & Syringe Exchange Scheme

Table 7 and Figure 5 illustrate the number and percentage of visits from males and females using NSES by their Health & Social Care Trust Area of Residence. Visits were mostly from male clients (82%). The highest percentage of visits from females using the service (18%) was in the Belfast Trust areas.

Table 7: Number and Percentage of Males & Females using NSES by Trust Area of Residence

Trust Area of Residence	Female	% of Trust Total	Male	% of Trust Total	Not Recorded	% of Trust Total	Total of Trust
Belfast	3414	18%	15400	80%	321	2%	19135
Northern	925	14%	5445	85%	15	0%	6385
South Eastern	749	17%	3600	81%	84	2%	4433
Southern	251	14%	1476	84%	20	1%	1747
Western	341	14%	2113	85%	21	1%	2475
Not Known	30	10%	171	59%	88	30%	289
Total	5710	17%	28205	82%	549	2%	34464



Number of Visits by main drug of injection

Table 8 illustrates the various types of drug users who used the NSES. Table 9 shows and Figure 6 charts the trend since 2017/18.

Under the NSES, data on the main drug clients report injection (“user type”) is collected on those injecting Amphetamines, Opiates, Steroids, Opiate & Steroid, Steroid & Tanning, Tanning and User Type Not Known. Participating pharmacies collected 92% of data on injecting detail which is a decrease of 4 percentage points on last year (96%). Of the total visits to the NSES it was recorded that 19.16% of users injected steroids rising to 20.05% when steroid & tanning and opiates & steroids are included in this figure. 94% of steroid users were male and only 5% female. When steroid & tanning and opiates & steroids are included with the steroid figure 94% are still male and 5% are still female.

Table 8: Number of Visits by main drug of injection and Trust Area of Pharmacy

Main drug of Injection	Trust Area of Pharmacy					Total
	Belfast	Northern	South Eastern	Southern	Western	
Amphetamines	17	5	7	7	10	46
	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Amphetamine + Opiates	<10	0	<10	0	0	3
	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Insulin	<10	<10	0	0	0	1
	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Opiates	17860	3591	872	1021	610	23954
	80%	60%	38%	70%	25%	70%
Opiates + Steroids	30	17	12	<10	<10	71
	0%	0%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Opiates + Tanning	0	<10	<10	<10	<10	4
	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
Steroid	2073	1899	978	202	1453	6605
	9%	32%	43%	14%	60%	19%
Steroid & Tanning	40	84	73	0	38	235
	0%	1%	3%	0%	2%	1%
Tanning	303	237	207	22	119	888
	1%	4%	9%	2%	5%	3%
Not Recorded	1959	190	139	193	176	2657
	9%	3%	6%	13%	7%	8%
Total Visits	22283 (100%)	6024 (100%)	2292 (100%)	1451 (100%)	2414 (100%)	34464 (100%)

Note: due to disclosure reasons some figures have been anonymised in the table above.

Over the last 3 years, the recording of user type has decreased slightly from 97% of visits in 2017/18 to 96% in 2018/19 and the figure dropped again to 92% in 2019/20. The Public Health Agency is continuing to encourage and support pharmacists to collect this data.

Figure 6: Needle & Syringe Exchange Scheme User Type by Years 2017/18, 2018/19 and 2019/20

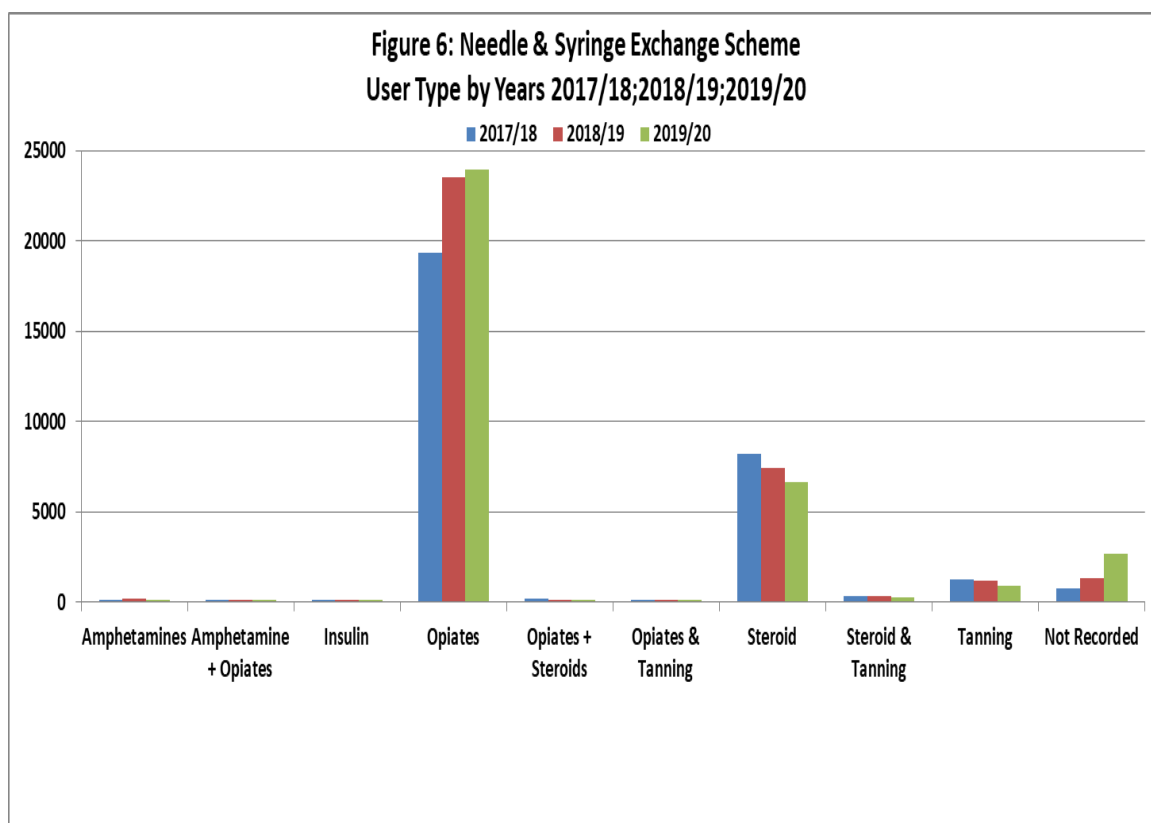


Table 9: Number of visits by User Type from 2017/18 to 2019/20

User Type Assigned	Number of Visits 2017/18	Number of Visits 2018/19	Number of Visits 2019/20
Amphetamines	57	145	46
Amphetamine + Opiates	<10	9	<10
Insulin	<10	21	<10
Opiates	19319	23553	23954
Opiates + Steroids	142	78	71
Opiates & Tanning	<10	8	<10
Steroid	8215	7387	6605
Steroid & Tanning	300	308	235
Tanning	1253	1171	888
Not Recorded	772	1312	2657

Note: due to disclosure reasons some figures have been anonymised in the table above.

Number and Percentage of Return of Cin Bins

A cin bin (incinerator bin) is a sealed container which is used to safely dispose of used needles and syringes and the aim is for clients to return their used bins to the pharmacy for secure disposal. Each pack contains a bin. During 2019/20 data shows that 31% of bins issued to users were returned, showing that the return rate has decreased by 4 percentage points since 2018/19. Pharmacies in the Western Trust area have the highest number of bins returned (61%), closely followed by the South Eastern Trust area (52%); both areas have lower rates of opiate users and more steroid users. The lowest return rate of 17% was by pharmacies in the Belfast Trust area, a decrease of 9 percentage points since 2018/19.

Tables 10/11 and Figure 7 shows the number and percentage of bins returned to pharmacies.

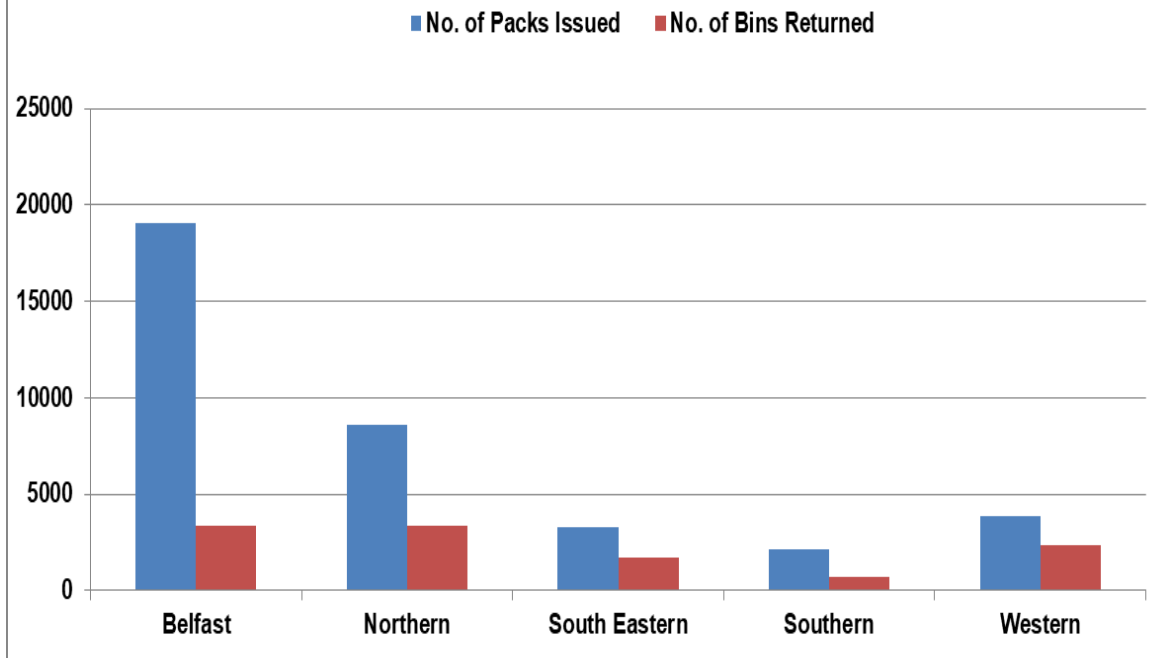
Table 10: Number and percentage of bins returned to pharmacies by Health & Social Care Trust Area of Pharmacy 2019/20

Trust Area of Pharmacy	No. of Packs Issued	No. of Bins Returned	% of Bins Returned
Belfast	19080	3319	17%
Northern	8582	3371	39%
South Eastern	3269	1696	52%
Southern	2166	675	31%
Western	3847	2355	61%
Grand Total	36944	11416	31%

Table 11: Percentage comparison of bins returned to pharmacies by Health & Social Care Trust Area of Pharmacy from 2017/18 to 2019/20

Trust Area of Pharmacy	17/18 % of Bins Returned	18/19 % of Bins Returned	19/20 % of Bins Returned
Belfast	27%	26%	17%
Northern	34%	38%	39%
South Eastern	68%	55%	52%
Southern	48%	36%	31%
Western	66%	63%	61%
Grand Total	38%	35%	31%

**Figure 7: Needle & Syringe Exchange Scheme
Comparison of Bins issued & Bins Returned 2019/20**



The Public Health Agency and Health and Social Care Board have been actively working with participating pharmacies to increase return rates. In addition to this, the PHA has been closely working with Belfast City Council and disposal units have been established in public places in Belfast to reduce the occurrence of discarded needles. A 24 hour contact line has also been set up by the Council for the collection of any discarded needles.

If you come across any sharps/needles in the city centre there is a mechanism in place to report these to Belfast City Council. These will be removed and disposed of in a safe manner by their team. The details for reporting these are below.

Telephone: 028 9027 0469 during office hours (8.00am – 5.00pm)

Telephone: 07850 499 622 out of hours (5.00pm – 8.00am - Including weekends, Public & Bank holidays)

Email (for non-emergency reporting): sharps@belfastcity.gov.uk

In 2016, the Public Health Agency worked with community pharmacies to carry out a survey with Needle Exchange clients to identify where and how unreturned injecting equipment is disposed of, and how clients can be supported to return their used equipment. The results of this survey suggest that some clients do not return cin bins on every visit because a single cin bin is large enough to hold needles obtained over a number of visits. In some cases therefore, low return rates may in part be accounted for by people bringing needles obtained over a number of visits back in one cin bin.

Cross Boundary Flow

Table 12 illustrates the cross-boundary flow of clients accessing the Scheme. In comparing the Health & Social Care Trust area of residence of the client and the Trust area of the pharmacy that they visit, it is noteworthy that 51% of visits by residents from the South-Eastern Trust area are to visit a pharmacy in the Belfast Trust area. Of the visits from clients who are residents of the Southern Trust area 16% are visits to Belfast Trust area pharmacies and 4% are visits to Northern Trust area pharmacies. In the Western Trust area 95% of visits are to a Western Trust area Pharmacy.

Table 12: A cross-reference of Health & Social Care Trust area of Residence of the Clients and the Trust area of Pharmacies visited in 2019/20

Trust Area of Residency of Clients using NSES	Trust Area of Pharmacies					
	Belfast Pharmacies	Northern Pharmacies	South Eastern Pharmacies	Southern Pharmacies	Western Pharmacies	Total
Belfast	18542 (97%)	407 (2%)	163 (1%)	16 (0%)	7 (0%)	19135 (100%)
Northern	932 (15%)	5385 (84%)	18 (0%)	18 (0%)	32 (1%)	6385 (100%)
South Eastern	2281 (51%)	62 (1%)	2058 (46%)	26 (1%)	6 (0%)	4433 (100%)
Southern	276 (16%)	66 (4%)	40 (2%)	1360 (78%)	5 (0%)	1747 (100%)
Western	42 (2%)	80 (3%)	<40 (0%)	<40 (0%)	2352 (95%)	2475 (100%)
Not Recorded & Outside N. Ireland	210 (73%)	24 (8%)	<40 (0%)	<40 (0%)	12 (4%)	289 (100%)

Note: due to disclosure reasons some figures have been anonymised in the table above.

Nb. Due to gaps in reporting as a result of COVID towards year end, the data shown in this report may be an under-representation for the 2019/20 year